

Edward Said and the Politics of Peace:  
From Orientalism to Terrorology

Julian Vigo

Since 9/11, the word “terrorism” has become a catch phrase for anything suspicious: “See Something, Say Something” is plastered across New York City’s buses and subway stops; the ongoing journalist debate continues between Hitchens, Chomsky, Cockburn and until recently, Said. The landscape of orientalism has returned, in force, and full regalia. Yet, it is not the Delacroix of fictive projections of the passive, accessible harem; instead we are to reckon with McCarthyist gestures that demonstrate one’s patriotism in the face of the Muslim who is everything but docile. In fact, the utter contradictions of this new enemy are almost comic if it weren’t for the tragic reality befalling the West: for this Muslim is both a sex-crazed rapist (ie. recent representations in the media); a patient, student of airplane lessons; an impatient religious zealot who seeks repose in the arms of black eyes *houris*; and a member of a greater plan whose every thought is to bring down the West. Oh, and I forgot that he is “jealous of our freedoms”. It would seem that Edward Said’s lessons of Orientalism have collapsed on our culture’s—to include most of the economically developed world—inability to fathom our own ignorance of places of which we know nothing.

So in the midst of Hitchens calling out traitors against his newly

---

adopted country and decrying any form of criticism of the United States or Israel, scholars back in North America are finding their academic freedoms being quickly diminished. Long gone are the days for open discourse on the topics of violence against Palestinians or even questioning the legitimacy of these new wars that most every Western power is either actively or passively supporting. Now there is a new “enemy”: the scholar who teaches the subjects of orientalism. HR 3077, the International Studies in Higher Education Act, poses a threat to academic freedom rendering professors “terrorist collaborators” should this bill pass. Essentially this bill sets up a board to monitor how federally funded regional studies departments support American foreign policy. Additionally, this bill mandates that the seven-member board would survey the tendentiousness of each department. Though this bill has not yet passed, it comes at a time when media and the current government is shutting down dissent, free speech, and more daunting, freedom of the press. Yet, there is a point of contention by right-wing academics who feel side-lined by what is thought to be a highly left-wing institution. There is a sense that scholars such as Edward Said are “overtaught”; hence the new right-wing push to “democratize” academia by the likes of Daniel Pipes and Stanly Kurtz, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, a right-wing think tank.

Rachid Khalidi finds that HR 3077 would “impose the teaching of one twisted version of Middle East reality, what I call terrorology, impose it at the taxpayers’ expense as one central element in the way the subject is taught. Or, by subjecting self-respecting universities to conditions they will not under any circumstances accept, it would curtail the teaching of the Middle East” (Goldberg). Clearly there is an ellision to examine the already biased media coverage of the Middle East and Muslims “back home”. Since 9/11 over 14,000 Muslim men have been disappeared in the United States due to racial profiling and a general panic to get Muslim met far away from American soil. Orientalism which functioned as a way for the Western subjects to imagine and dominate their [sic] non-Western objects throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, today is re-invigorated with the desire to

dominate by killing, torturing, jailing and exposing to judicial “special registration”.

More recently, we have seen how even the dead, pro-civil rights scholar has threatened the status quo. In January 2001, the Freud Society of Vienna, where Edward Said was to give a lecture on Freud’s fascination with Egyptian, Greek and Palestinian civilizations, cancelled his appearance after several members saw the widely diffused July 2000 photo of Said throwing a stone in Palestine. The photo of Edward Said, his arm stretched back with ostensibly an object (not large enough to be visible in the photo) in his hand, resulted in the cancellation of his speech later that Spring, as Johann August Schüle, the society’s president, told *The New York Times*: “A lot of members of our society told us they can’t accept that we have invited an engaged Palestinian who also throws stones against Israeli soldiers” (Smith). Yet the myth surrounding this photo unfolded in the many corrections that *The New York Times* printed in the days following,<sup>1</sup> whereby it was finally clarified that Said was nowhere near guards, nor aiming at the Israeli Defense Forces, but was aiming at an empty guard house three hundred meters away on the Lebanese border.

Then after Said’s death in 2003, *The New York Times* printed Said’s obituary—or should I state *obituaries*—which revealed more of polysemous interpretations of Said: the 25 September, 2003 obituary misidentified Said’s family home (stating it was in Jerusalem instead of Cairo), misstates the date of the partition of Jerusalem (claiming 1947 instead of 1949) and it

---

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times* published the following two corrections:

Correction: March 13, 2001, Tuesday A picture caption in Arts & Ideas on Saturday with an article about the Vienna Freud Society’s cancellation of a lecture by Prof. Edward Said of Columbia University, after members saw a photograph of him throwing a stone, misstated his target. He was aiming toward an Israeli guardhouse at the Lebanese border, not at Israeli soldiers.

Correction: March 14, 2001, Wednesday A picture caption in Arts & Ideas on Saturday with an article about the Vienna Freud Society’s cancellation of a lecture by Prof. Edward Said of Columbia University, after members saw a photograph of him throwing a stone on the Lebanese border, referred incompletely to his act. And a correction in this space yesterday omitted attribution for a differing account. It was Professor Said who said he had been throwing toward an Israeli guardhouse, not at Israeli soldiers.

---

misidentifies Said's last book: *Freud and the Non-European* (published with Christopher Bollas and Jacqueline Rose). The 26 September obituary states "Correction Appended" in large font above the article, yet this obituary, bearing the precise title as the obituary the previous day, with the actual "correction" added on 1 October after the article ran for almost a week<sup>2</sup>, is quite different in language and content throughout its entirety, not just in the final "correction appendix": "Mr. Said" was replaced with "Dr. Said"; the "Popular Front for Palestine" was replaced with "George Habash's Popular Front for Palestine", and finally there was the inclusion of the "stone throwing incident". The 25 September obituary makes no mention of this event while the 26 September obituary ends a resumé of Said's life with this "scandal":

In July 2000 Dr. Said became embroiled in an international contretemps over a widely published photograph that showed him at the Lebanese border about to hurl a stone at an Israeli guardhouse. Dr. Said, who was traveling with his family at the time, dismissed the action as trivial, calling it a "symbolic gesture of joy" that Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon had ended.

Bernstein's obituary turns into a political character assessment of Said with his credibility as a scholar and his university affiliation being put into

---

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times* correction is as follows:

Correction: Oct. 1, 2003, Wednesday

*An obituary on Friday about Edward W. Said, the Columbia University literary scholar and advocate of a Palestinian state, misidentified the city that was his childhood home and misstated the date of Jerusalem's partition into Jewish and Arab areas. Although Mr. Said was born in Jerusalem, in 1935, his family's home was Cairo; they did not move from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was partitioned in 1949, not 1947.*

*The obituary also misidentified his most recent book. It was "Freud and the Non-European," with Christopher Bollas and Jacqueline Rose (Verso Books, 2003). "The Politics of Dispossession" (Pantheon) was published in 1994.*

---

question<sup>3</sup> due to the “stone incident” along with his “political views” and his alleged lack of critique of Arab leaders.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the obituary ends on one of the most obtuse statements made about Edward Said’s work I have ever read: “In his last years Dr. Said’s literary production became more and more political.” Both Bernstein’s obituaries mention how Said’s work throughout his career (save, perhaps, his musical criticism for *The Nation*) has always been political--from *Orientalism* which links the West’s cultural representation to its politics of imperialism and domination to *Culture and Imperialism* which demonstrates that *Jane Austin* “provided a cultural legitimization for colonialism”. As I wonder what Mr. Bernstein means when he writes that Said’s work became “more and more political” over time, it is clear that Said’s work was being interpreted in a “more and more” politically contentious way.

For many readers like Bernstein it would seem, texts like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* safely take to task Western hegemony--cultural, political and economic--and all the institutions that help constitute such a monolith of power. I use the term “safely” because in questioning the colonialist imperative of the West, these texts do not *overtly* connect the dots; however, after reading any of Said’s earlier writings, one need not blink to see how cultural hegemony translates into occupation and its concomitant legitimization throughout the West which Said addresses early on in *Orientalism*:

I doubt if it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries which was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and

---

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein writes: “To my knowledge, the stone was directed at no one; no law was broken; no indictment was made; no criminal or civil action has been taken against Professor Said,” Jonathan R. Cole, then the provost and dean of faculties, wrote in an open letter to Columbia’s student government and the student newspaper.

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein writes: “But Dr. Said was far more critical of the West and of Israel and their approach to the Arab world than he was of the Arabs or their leaders”.

---

impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact – and yet *that is what I am saying* in this study of Orientalism (11).

And thus, was born Said's redefinition of the orientalist, a term which no longer harkened to the glorious days of safaris with servants in the "wild" of India or the tableaux of Delacroix' scantily dressed women in his choreographed harems, instead the orientalist became a pejorative term which demarcated these glorified imperial visions as purely problematic. So one must wonder what kind of "more and more political" is Bernstein perceiving, if all of Said's cultural and literary texts address the actual political situations, histories, cultures and literatures in terms of past colonialisms and the present, neo-colonizing world.

I deeply suspect that Bernstein's and Smith's focus upon Said's politicization is entirely centered upon his "rock throwing" in both the literal sense, the infamous 2000 photo, and in a symbolic sense, part of a larger backlash against area studies fomented in the United States around this time which attempted to view theorists such as Said, as terrorists, by virtue of any political enunciation critical of the United States or Israel. This is the core of the issue: not that Said had been apolitical in *Orientalism*, but that Said moved from the role of academic and interpreter of cultural and political signs to, with the publication of this photo, that of actor and of the orientalized vision of the Palestinian: that of the rock thrower. Hence, it was after this incident and the publication of Said's autobiography, *Out of Place*, in 1999 that Said's fiercest critics would accuse him of falsifying his history<sup>5</sup>, only use quotations when referring to him as a "Palestinian" and few actually critique Said's writing in the last years of his life<sup>6</sup>. Instead of

---

<sup>5</sup> Weiner accused Said of not having attended St. George's School in Jerusalem,

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Hitchens's "Where the Twain Should Have Met" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2003), is a critique of Said's introduction to the new edition of *Orientalism*, nonetheless couched in a pro-US stance against Said's criticisms of the US-led invasion about which he writes: "In the process the uncountable sediments of history, which include innumerable histories and a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences, and cultures, all these are swept aside or ignored, relegated to the sand heap along with the treasures ground into meaningless fragments that were taken out of Baghdad's libraries and museums. My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with

addressing Said's work, there tends to be a trend within the right to consciously elide or reject Said's identity as Palestinian (just as there is within the state of Israel today which denies the right of return for millions of Palestinians) as well as an attempt to equate Said, along with other well-known US scholars who criticized the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or the occupation of Palestine, as "terrorist apologists"<sup>7</sup> So, in picking up the rock that day in the West Bank, Edward Said became, for all the naysayers to see, truly Palestinian; ergo, the link was made between his decades of intellectual production and the orientalist symbolic gesture of terrorist activity. Said had "proved" his most ruthless critics correct (that he was indeed a "terrorist") in a strangely dialectically-reflexive position of being himself the object of orientalism.

Said's person has been persistently under attack by the right--from the likes of Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Fouad Ajami, to more recently Justus Reid Weiner--and even by the left, notably Aijaz Ahmed. While Lewis and Pipes view Said as anti-Western with Pipes having called him a terrorist and Weiner accusing Said of falsifying his claims to being a "Palestinian", Ahmed at least retaliates through a certain intellectual rigor, viewing Said as enamored of the west--it's literature and music--with Ahmed calling Said's mind "essentially Tory in structure" and critiquing him for implying that imperialism is "*mainly* a cultural phenomenon to be opposed by an

---

various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that "our" East, "our" Orient, becomes "ours" to possess and direct."

<sup>7</sup> Included in this list is: Noam Chomsky, Tom Nagy, Mazin Qumsiyeh, Eric Foner, Jim Rego in his article "Profs who Hate America" ([danielpipes.org](http://danielpipes.org)). Elsewhere, Pipes has used this term "apologists" for the: Council on American Islamic Relations, Eric Foner, Rashid Khalidi, Gary Sick, George Saliba, Joseph Masad, and anyone who denies "that *jihad* has any military meaning whatsoever", as he published a series of letters from his supporters who concur with *his* definition of *jihad* ("Letters to the Editor: Jihad and the Professors").

Daniel Pipes on his website, [danielpipes.org](http://danielpipes.org), in "Campus Watch and Saving Mideast Studies" defines "apologists" as: "Specialists generally avoid subjects that reflect poorly on their region, such as repression in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Muslim anti-Semitism and chattel slavery in Sudan. The MESA president recently discouraged studying what he called "terrorology." Specialists sometimes actively deceive, for example, by denying that jihad historically has meant offensive warfare.

---

*alternative discourse*" (204), a criticism others on the left have likewise made. While some critics feel that all sides are correct in viewing Said as somehow a traitor to his own identity, to the United States and to the the left,<sup>8</sup> I find that these arguments are nothing more than spectacularized intellectual-esque gossip columns whose primary focus is to avoid discussing the central issues of Said's work and the problems invoked by such criticisms that detract from the very real genocides occurring in Palestine and in Iraq today. Indeed, both the left and right might actually be partially on target, not because Said somehow dishonestly chose one culture over the other, but because such potential contradictions hold the truths of all our individual identities which are rarely, if ever, singular. In fact, I would argue that Said, the stone throwing intellectual poses a complete vision of both Edward Said the person and simultaneously the sad state of affairs in the West, the inability of journalists from *The New York Times* to grasp these seemingly contradictory images of a cultural and political thinker who picked up a stone and, in a show of solidarity, threw it in support of the end of violence (at the Lebanese border).

But then these journalists are informed by all hues of academic production which have been silenced and placed under scrutiny since 9/11, more notably since 2002 when Daniel Pipes, a quite unremarkable scholar, created Campus Watch, a modern day McCarthyist website in which dossiers were published on professors it deemed "hostile" to the United States (and more to the point, those who were critical of Israel), keeping track of everything and everyone Left and un-American in the academic halls of U.S. universities.<sup>9</sup> Later in 2002 Campus Watch removed the

---

<sup>8</sup> See A.O. Scott's article in *Slate*, "Edward W. Said: The Palestinian Tory" (October 1, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> On the campus-watch.org website reads: "CAMPUS WATCH, a project of the Middle East Forum, reviews and critiques Middle East studies in North America with an aim to improving them. The project mainly addresses five problems: analytical failures, the mixing of politics with scholarship, intolerance of alternative views, apologetics, and the abuse of power over students. Campus Watch fully respects the freedom of speech of those it debates while insisting on its own freedom to comment on their words and deeds."



dossiers on the eight professors and now keeps a list of “recommended professors” and scholars whom it deems “balanced”. Regarded by many as a bitter, failed academic who remained angry towards Said’s work coincidentally curtailing his own career in academia, Pipes nonetheless gained political notariety during the G.W. Bush administration as was nominated for the United States Institute of Peace serving between 2003 and 2005 on the board and earlier worked for the Department of Defense (a peaceful defense?) serving on the Special Task Force on Terrorism and Technology (from 2001-2002). In addition to Bush era legitimization, Pipes is a signatory to the Project for the New American Century, and during the first few years following 9/11, Pipes consistently pursued scholars who did not agree with the definitions of *jihad*<sup>10</sup>, *madrasa*, and other such definitions that did not reflect the very conservative posture of Pipes.

Pipes was raised in an academic environment and eventually he received his PhD in medieval Islamic history from Harvard in 1978 when the field of Middle Eastern studies was shaken with the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* that same year, creating a radical shift in hiring within these departments which were generally no longer sympathetic to scholars who justified imperialist ventures. Rejected by academia except for a few brief stints, Pipes worked for the Foreign Policy Research Institute (a right-wing think tank), founded the Middle East Forum and *The Middle East Quarterly* (both the forum and its journal promoted aggressive military intervention in the Middle East, especially in Iraq). In his neo-con career, Pipes has written

---

<sup>10</sup> Zayed Yasin as cited in Pipes’ “Jihad and the Professors” stated in June 2002: “Jihad, in its truest and purest form, the form to which all Muslims aspire, is the determination to do right, to do justice even against your own interests. It is an individual struggle for personal moral behavior. Especially today, it is a struggle that exists on many levels: self-purification and awareness, public service and social justice. On a global scale, it is a struggle involving people of all ages, colors, and creeds, for control of the Big Decisions: not only who controls what piece of land, but more importantly who gets medicine, who can eat.” Pipes responds to this speech with “As I discovered through an examination of media statements by such university-based specialists, they tend to portray the phenomenon of jihad in a remarkably similar fashion—only, the portrait happens to be false.”

---

numerous articles advocating racial profiling,<sup>11</sup> claiming that Iraqis are not ready for democracy and that they need a “strongman” (read, dictator) since Iraqis live in “a world of conspiracy theories”,<sup>12</sup> and warning Western nations from accepting Muslim immigrants because their “customs are more troublesome than most”.<sup>13</sup> Equally as troubling, Pipes wrote about Washington D.C.’s Beltway sniper, John Muhammad, claiming that Muhammad “saw himself as a foot soldier in the *jihad* against the United States”<sup>14</sup> and a related article wherein he discusses “a well-established tradition of American blacks who convert to Islam turning against their country”.<sup>15</sup> Over the course of a few years mainly between 1999 and 2003, Pipes attained a notoriety that for many on the right was refreshing since he tackled the anti-American ethos a few felt endangered the United States<sup>16</sup>, but for most serious scholars Pipes was considered nothing other than a “war pimp”<sup>17</sup> or a disingenuous neo-con whose sole purpose is to inspire fear, hatred and support for Western-sponsored violence against the Muslim world.

Yet in 2003 the hysteria that Pipes had started three years earlier, in part due to the general fear in the United States post 9/11 and in part due to the hawkish Bush administration, took root when his efforts finally reached Congress and the U.S. House of Representatives passed the “International Studies in Higher Education Act of 2003” (legislation HR 3077),<sup>18</sup> which

---

<sup>11</sup> Pipes, Daniel. “Why the Japanese Internment Still Matters”, *New York Sun* (December 28, 2004) and “The Enemy Within and the Need for Profiling”, *New York Post* (January 24, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> “A Strongman for Iraq”, *New York Post*. (April 28, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> “The Muslims are Coming! The Muslims are Coming!” *National Review* (November 19, 1990)

<sup>14</sup> “The Snipers: Crazy or Jihadis?” *New York Post*. October 29, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Beltway Snipers: Converts to Violence? *New York Post*. October 25, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Read Pipes “Columbia University vs. America” at [danielpipes.org](http://danielpipes.org)

<sup>17</sup> William Hughes’ article “George Wil: War Pimp”. *Counterpunch*. 24 September, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> The major points of concern regarding this bill for American academics were the

created an advisory board whose task was to “study” university area studies programs.<sup>19</sup> In addition, this bill made federal funding contingent upon curricula being approved by these boards.<sup>20</sup> All this from someone who has been largely dismissed by the American left as an “Islamophobe” and “fanatic”, but who, not surprisingly, tapped into an administration which was as rife with political hawkishness and cultural ignorance of the Middle East as it was teeming with neo-conservative impulses to advance war based on the very paradoxical basis for Said’s original publication, *Orientalism*: that the Muslims “were out to kill us all”. Even more twisted in this recent history, terms which have found their way into quotidian political lexicon on the far right paradoxically harbor their opposite meanings or they are terms used to silence dissent. For instance, in the early days of the “War on Terror” “foreign fighters” never referred to U.S. or British soldiers; “self-hating

---

following:

Section 6 Details the independent International Higher Education Advisory Board, which will include two members of national security agencies. The tasks of this advisory board include making recommendations “to improve the programs under [Title VI] to better reflect the national needs related to the homeland security, international education, international affairs, and foreign language training.”

Section 7 - Details requirements for Title VI institutions to provide Federal Government agency recruiter access to students and student recruiting information.

Section 8 Directs the Secretary of Education, along with the International Advisory Board, to study “foreign language heritage communities” within the United States, “particularly such communities that include speakers of languages that are critical to the national security of the United States.”

<sup>19</sup> Section 633, C states:

“The Board is authorized to study, monitor, apprise, and evaluate a sample of activities supported under this title in order to provide recommendations to the Secretary and the Congress for the improvement of programs under the title and to ensure programs meet the purposes of the title. The recommendations of the Board may address any area in need of improvement, except that any recommendation of specific legislation to Congress shall be made only if the President deems it necessary and expedient.”

<sup>20</sup> Section C Advisory Board reads: “Part D of title VI is amended by inserting after section 632 (as added by section 5) the following new section” and as well 621. (F) “make recommendations on how institutions of higher education that receive a grant under this title can encourage students to serve the nation and meet national needs in an international affairs, international business, foreign language, or national security capacity;”

Jews” referred to American Jewish academics who decried the invasion of Iraq; “apologists” were journalists and scholars who wrote against the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and who suggested that U.S. politicians examine the reasons behind 9/11; and “terrorist sympathizers” was used for anyone questioning the human rights abuses of Guantanamo or Baghram prisons, amongst many other labels. Thus HR 3007, even though it did not pass the Senate, demonstrated that a disgruntled scholar like Daniel Pipes could threaten an entire educational tradition of intellectual autonomy in the United States, that his neo-McCarthyist tone was fully embraced by the U.S. government since 9/11 and continues to flourish within these pockets of right-wing think tanks, and it indicated that the Orientalist paradox outlined by Said in his 1978 text could easily become the stage for a major backlash against all things humanist, Arabo-Muslim, immigrant and intellectually rigorous. The sad fact is that the neo-conservative *coup* in the United States took place on the grounds of jargon, reductive name-calling, outright lies, and mostly a decisive, antagonistic denial of historical facts in favor of fabrications, baseless journalistic inventions<sup>21</sup>, a refusal to listen to intelligence experts within the C.I.A.,<sup>22</sup> and a collusion between journalists and the government whereby facts are “spotty” and journalists now claim not to be responsible for assessing information before reporting it.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times* reporter, Judith Miller, invented the story of the “Weapons of Mass Destruction Program” with Michael R. Gordon, quoting “unnamed American officials” and “American intelligence experts” who claimed that metal tubes bound for Iraq were intended to be used to enrich nuclear material writing: ““Mr. Hussein’s dogged insistence on pursuing his nuclear ambitions, along with what defectors described in interviews as Iraq’s push to improve and expand Baghdad’s chemical and biological arsenals, have brought Iraq and the United States to the brink of war.” (September 7, 2002). After this factless story was published, Donal Rumsfeld, Condaleezza Rice, and Colin Powell all appeared on television and pointed to Miller’s story as the basis for the U.S. going to war against Iraq.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Jehl’s “Report Says White House Ignored C.I.A. on Iraq Chaos.” *The New York Times*. October 12, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Massing’s «Now They Tell Us», *New York Review of Books*. (February 26, 2004) discusses the problem of intelligence that was ignored and journalism that was invented in support of the Second Iraq Invasion as Miller states: ““my job isn’t to assess the government’s information and be an independent intelligence analyst

It is not at all surprising that the civil war now being played out in Iraq was actually commended by Daniel Pipes two years ago<sup>24</sup> given the nonchalant and fraudulent approach to war in Washington. But facts are still facts: there are now over a million plus Iraqis who have lost their lives and thousands of invading forces who have been killed because of the myths created in order to justify the invasions. The "War on Terror" is rife with misunderstandings which discourage dialogue, dismiss historical and political facts and engage Orientalist precepts at their very roots: fact has no place in political discourse today because anyone contesting the neo-conservative push to war over the past eight years has been sidelined, assumed to be "against us"<sup>25</sup>, called un-American and in some cases, been imprisoned and labeled a "terrorist". Even sadder is that most Americans distrust both their government and their media<sup>26</sup> due to the lies that have emerged over the past seven years, but paradoxically because of the lies spun by both institutions, the media and the state, Americans' access to facts is mediated by the gut instincts of a misguided administration and a falsifying mass media for whom "fact-checking" is no longer on the agenda<sup>27</sup>.

Here Stephen Colbert's parody of a right-wing talk show host come to mind (*The Colbert Report*) who avoids facts and honors "truthiness".<sup>28</sup> For

---

myself. My job is to tell readers of *The New York Times* what the government thought about Iraq's arsenal."

<sup>24</sup> Pipes writes: "When Sunni terrorists target Shi'ites and vice versa, non-Muslims are less likely to be hurt....Civil war in Iraq, in short, would be a humanitarian tragedy, but not a strategic one." "Civil War in Iraq" *Jerusalem Post* March 1, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> In reference to George W. Bush's famous enunciation: "You are either with us or against us."

<sup>26</sup> A Harris Interactive poll found that 54% of Americans "tend not to trust the media" (2008) and a Pew Research Center for the Public and the Press found that only one-third of Americans trust the government.

<sup>27</sup> Miller famously said in an interview with Michael Maussig: "My job isn't to assess the government's information and be an independent intelligence analyst myself. My job is to tell readers of *The New York Times* what the government thought about Iraq's arsenal."

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Colbert hosts a satirical news show in which he emulates a right-wing

the parodic figure of Colbert is someone who mirrors much of the current administration and mass media which has undertaken an orientalizing colonization of Iraq: "If I want to believe that World War I started in 1941, it is my god-given right as an American". This is what Colbert calls the "No Fact Zone". And as amusing as it is to see Colbert or Jon Stewart in action presenting "fake news" four times each week, it is likewise disturbing that Americans on the left have only these two comedy channels to which to turn in order to see any cogent televised critique on the current international and domestic political scene. The "No Fact Zone" is a reality today and terrifyingly it is one which has become the only de-orientalising means for separating—albeit through irony and repetition of the right wing's nonsensical views of the world—what is fact from what is fiction. Colbert's refreshing interviews with left-wing writers at times elicits, "Sir, why do you hate our country?" while Colbert steers clear of anything factual to give his version of the news *the way he wants it to be*. As political parody, this is amusing; as an ominous glance into the myths passed off as truths in the nexus between media and government, this is tragic.

So, we must begin to understand how Edward Said's work became not "more and more political" but certainly more and more empirical, investigating facts related to this very conundrum of orientalism-making because of an increasing disregard for the facts in a neocolonizing world in which he lived, in which we live. Critical of the "War on Terror", as many scholars have been since its inception, Said bridged his critical theory on orientalism directly to the Bush administration's tactics for warning about "terrorists": "What is especially bad about all terror is when it is attached to religious and political abstractions and reductive myths that keep veering away from history and sense" ("Collective Passion"). Said was deeply suspicious of the West's drumbeat based on orientalizing abstractions of the Al Qaeda operative, cells that could be just about anywhere, and repeated

---

talk show host, often using the term "truthiness" meaning not that which is fact (he is not a "facinista", but that which describes what a person claims to know intuitively, "from the gut" without regard to facts, intellectual cogitation or discussion.

---

images of Arabs as terrorists. Not much had changed from the context of *Orientalism* to 2001 as we were given repeated images in the West of the Arab as irrational, untrustworthy, anti-Western (anti-democratic), dishonest and threatening. Even his clothes were threatening—the wide garbs could be hiding anything, pregnant women could be bomb carriers, and the head coverings of both men and women were now looked at with both suspicion and fear. Let us return to this bifurcation of Orientalist/Oriental that Said outlines in *Orientalism*:

Of itself, in itself, as a set of beliefs, as a method of analysis, Orientalism cannot develop. Indeed, it is the doctrinal antithesis of development. Its central argument is the myth of the arrested development of the Semites. From this matrix other myths pour forth, each of them showing the Semite to be the opposite of the Westerner and irredeemably the victim of his own weaknesses. By a concatenation of events and circumstances the Semitic myth bifurcated in the Zionist movement; one Semite went the way of Orientalism, the other, the Arab, was forced to go the way of the Oriental... Each time tent and tribe are solicited, the myth is being employed; each time the concept of the Arab national character is evoked, the myth is being employed. The hold these instruments have on the mind is increased by the institutions built around them. For every Orientalist, quite literally, there is a support system of staggering power, considering the ephemerality of the myths that Orientalism propagates. The system now culminates in the very institutions of the state. To write about the Arab Oriental world, therefore, is to write with the authority of a nation, and not with the affirmation of a strident ideology but with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed with absolute force (307).

Hence the legislation of HR 3077 can be seen here: that the study of Arabs was assumed to “need guidance”. Because of the high percentage of Arab scholars (race was a factor in this legislation), Pipes was able to push this issue into the U.S. House of Representatives and ultimately HR 3077 was an

attempt to set back the clock and return to an era when Orientalism meant controlling the flow of knowledge by replacing fact with myth. All this because the Oriental had simply gotten "out of control": lacking objectivity to designing her course syllabi, questioning the authority of the state in not supporting the "War on Terror" and by virtue of her inability to "fit in", she herself became a terrorist. We have returned to the ideology evidenced by Huntington's maps where you can clearly see the West and "the rest".

For all the criticism from Daniel Pipes and major news media that savaged Arab and Muslim scholars about not criticizing the terrorists involved in 9/11, Said was one of many scholars engaged in such critiques, deconstructing terrorism much in the same way he deconstructed Orientalism:

[M]uch as it has been quarrelled over by Muslims, there isn't a single Islam: there are *Islams*, just as there are Americas. This diversity is true of all traditions, religions or nations, even though some of their adherents have futilely tried to draw boundaries around themselves and pin their creeds down neatly. Yet history is far more complex and contradictory than to be represented by demagogues who are much less representative than either their followers or opponents claim... (With astonishing prescience in 1907, Joseph Conrad drew the portrait of the archetypal terrorist, whom he calls laconically "the Professor" in his novel *The Secret Agent*; this is a man whose sole concern is to perfect a detonator that will work under any circumstances and whose handiwork results in a bomb exploded by a poor boy sent, unknowingly, to destroy the Greenwich Observatory as a strike against "pure science.") ("Collective Passion").

There are two ways of reading these words, of course and I believe Said intended both readings. The first reading is that the terrorism operates against science (reason) and often feeds upon the innocent in carrying out desperate acts of violence in its opposing claims to power. The second reading here is that violence of any name, as in Conrad's novel, operates in stark contrast to reason and affects the war-torn and economically



impoverished nations outside the West, but it also includes the West's opposition to reason: "On the other hand, immense military and economic power such as the US possesses is no guarantee of wisdom or moral vision, particularly when obduracy is thought of as a virtue and exceptionalism believed to be the national destiny."<sup>29</sup> So as *Orientalism* shows that the oriental is a myth, a stereotype, the oriental, like the power of western powers such as the United States had mistaken their might for reason. Just as Said has shown us over the years how the Oriental myth succeeded as a result of European dominance in Asia and the Middle East, it is clear that the U.S. has taken over this physical and discursive role.

So with each day that the "War on Terror" endured, Said was consistently attacking the lack of facts within American political culture and the media:

Look at the pusillanimity of the media during the buildup to an illegal and unjust war against Iraq, and look at how little coverage there was of the immense damage against Iraqi society done by the sanctions, and how relatively few accounts there were of the immense world-wide outpouring of opinion against the war. Hardly a single journalist except Helen Thomas has taken the administration to task for the outrageous lies and confected "facts" that were spun out about Iraq as an imminent military threat to the US before the war, just as now the same government propagandists, whose cynically invented and manipulated "facts" about WMD are now more or less forgotten or

---

<sup>29</sup> Said continues: The New York and Washington suicide bombers seem to have been middle-class, educated men, not poor refugees. Instead of getting a wise leadership that stresses education, mass mobilisation and patient organisation in the service of a cause, the poor and the desperate are often conned into the magical thinking and quick bloody solutions that such appalling models provide, wrapped in lying religious claptrap. This remains true in the Middle East generally, Palestine in particular, but also in the United States, surely the most religious of all countries. It is also a major failure of the class of secular intellectuals not to have redoubled their efforts to provide analysis and models to offset the undoubted sufferings of the large mass of their people, immiserated and impoverished by globalism and an unyielding militarism with scarcely anything to turn to except blind violence and vague promises of future salvation."

---

shrugged off as irrelevant, are let off the hook by media heavies in discussing the awful, the literally inexcusable situation for the people of Iraq that the US has now single-handedly and irresponsibly created there ("The Meaning of Rachel Corrie").

Said recognizes that not only can "facts" be created, but that social memory is completely dependent upon the media which represents these "facts", rendering invisible atrocities that have happened simply because what is not seen does not exist and rescripting events such that innocent parties are made to seem somehow guilty. Sadly, it is of dangerously little value when truths finally do emerge since the lines between "fact" and "fiction" have been blurred to such a degree that the media have become so inextricably linked to the state. So with the second U.S. invasion of Iraq "embedded journalism" became a means of giving spectators false reliance to media sources as we were shown the lives of the military and journalists as if "reality t.v.". Journalism failed completely as there was no impetus to question anything—not the untruthful reasons for war and not the frightened faces of journalists who escape "enemy fire". The spectator has only his eyes to believe and what he sees is shocking, but it is every bit as scripted as any Hollywood movie. Thus, mass media in the U.S. began a new trend of journalism (thanks in part to Fox News) whereby journalists no longer report and instead they create news, giving *ad hoc* commentary in support of the war, express their personal political views, and rarely verify or question facts. Indeed, is it any surprise that most Americans had no idea that the Middle East was the scene of an earlier failed empire on behalf of the British colonial efforts that had in its day also operated on the basis of lies?<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Said writes of the parallels between empires: "So let us not accept any longer the ideological demagoguery that leaves language and reality as the sole property of American power, or of so-called Western perspectives. The core of the matter is of course imperialism, that (in the end banal) self-assumed mission to rid the world of evil figures like Saddam in the name of justice and progress. Revisionist justifications of the invasion of Iraq and the American war on terrorism that have become one of the least welcome imports from an earlier failed empire, Britain, and have coarsened discourse and distorted fact and history with alarming

So when I read the two versions of Said's obituary, part of me laughed for this is the type of revisionist approach to journalism and history that Said appreciated as a scholar. Another part of me is saddened because what is at stake in the age of continued "errata" (the few times they are actually issued) in any newspaper or media source is that the "correction" never really undoes the damage. And the damage in this case did not specifically operate as *agumentum ad hominem* towards Edward Said—his legacy stands on its own—but it operated on the basis of reducing all Palestinians to that motion of a defiance against the law *without any reason for such posturing*. In sixty years of Israeli statehood and Palestinian oppression, all the Palestinians have to show for their suffering in major media, are the clichés of the stone throwing youth who takes his anger on the innocent Israeli and the suicide bomber who, because of Islamicist brainwashing, blows herself up. Neither cliché speaks to the decades of suffering by Palestinians which are the undeniable reasons behind such actions. Instead, revisionist histories show these acts of violence as commonplace lifestyles amongst Palestinians. In terms of Israel and Palestine, fact and fiction are virtually unidentifiable in U.S. media which rarely mentions the historical situation to any depth and instead keeps all news to fast images and brief sound bites about the "cycle of violence", as if there are just "two sides". Said's later writings speak to honoring facts and demystifying myths, an impetus directly related to his ideas about "limiting loss", as he urges other academics to "focus on historical and concrete facts", the only viable means to solving the problems of Palestinian autonomy and statehood.<sup>31</sup> But is fluency" ("Dreams and Delusions").

---

<sup>31</sup> Said remarks: "The difference is that the Jewish people claim that their relationship to Palestine goes back 3000 years, and that they were exiled from it and displaced 2500 years ago. But the expulsion of the Palestinians from Palestine began just yesterday. Still, we should not forget that the Zionist official history was founded on the diaspora and the idea of permanent exile—this history uses many myths. I think we as Palestinians should avoid myths, and it appears to me that we as intellectuals must focus on the historical and concrete facts and refuse to utilize mythological dimensions. I cannot accept the notion that the Palestinian refugee will remain a refugee forever. I am among those who think that there will not be a realistic solution unless it deals with the current situation of Palestinians as refugees.

language enough, I wonder as the situation of representation degrades?

In the almost five years since Said's death, the image of the stone-throwing Palestian persists and now Said is forever fixed as part of that image's breadth. But I don't think it is at all a bad thing. To the contrary, I see Edward Said's lifelong work moving towards a debunking of all sorts of Orientalisms throughout history and contemporary life— it is only so ironic that in performing this act of sympathy towards peace, the opposite was extrapolated merely because the symbol is hard-fixed and impermeable. There is no room for any other interpretation given the homogeneous readings persistent in the U.S. and Israel. In fact, I don't know if there will ever be a time in history when humans will look to violent gestures of resistance with anything other than fear and "prepackaged" rhetoric that disavows dialogue before ever beginning. But this is the task of the journalist and scholar: to ask the uncomfortable questions, to verify and even to find truth. Inasmuch as such ideals might be considered "corny" or idealistic, they are nonetheless valences which can operate if we understand the dangers of using language as a falsifying power and if we learn how language might address the underlying problems resulting in very real, quotidian suffering of millions. To address this fear of the rock hurling Palestinian is the task of Israelis and to interpret the aim of the hurler is the job of media and scholars, albeit through different tools of interpretation. The language of war and suffering must be turned on its head because the very inflammatory language of hatred and division does not remain within the strict confines of geographical space. Like all language, political speak, when aimed at targeting Arabs or Muslims (or those who look like the stereotype fed them), is infective and it does kill, whether it is the war created based on the lies of Judith Miller and Donald Rumsfeld, or the resulting actions of Americans who murdered "Arab-looking" men shortly

---

Thus the question is: is it possible to relive our past and restore history to pre-1948? I doubt that. We suffered a loss; it can be said that our people lost the battle temporarily. The question is to what extent? I do not think that any one at the present has a final answer to this question. What we have to do now is to limit this loss." ("Edward Said Discusses *Orientalism*")

---

after 9/11.<sup>32</sup> Yet Said is less optimistic about resuscitating the language of suffering in Palestine:

The language of suffering and concrete daily life has either been hijacked, or it has been so perverted as, in my opinion, to be useless except as pure fiction deployed as a screen for the purpose of more killing and painstaking torture -- slowly, fastidiously, inexorably. That is the truth of what Palestinians suffer. ("Punishment by Detail")

Because the social realities of Palestine today are so grim, Said offers a distressing vision in which language has no place, or at the very least it has no power. And it is in coming to terms with the totalitarian forms of silencing and producing "fake news" prevalent in a very corrupt, global media, we might eventually come to see why many others do give up on words as well. They give up on writing, reading, studying and pick up a stone. Or they reach for something far more explosive. Said's legacy leaves us the task of investigating and analyzing the schism between the language and the actions of the suffering Palestinians so that we as scholars can convert these stones and bombs and their concomitant sufferings into words that resonate with truth. Where terrorology dominates, Orientalism mutates into a much more aggressive form of domination that makes 19th century colonialism seem quite tame..

#### *Works Cited*

---

<sup>32</sup> Said comments: "Pundits and hosts refer non-stop to "our" war with Islam, and words like "jihad" and "terror" have aggravated the understandable fear and anger that seem widespread all over the country. Two people (one a Sikh) have already been killed by enraged citizens who seem to have been encouraged by remarks like Defense Department official Paul Wolfowitz's to literally think in terms of "ending countries" and nuking our enemies. Hundreds of Muslim and Arab shopkeepers, students, *hijab-ed* women and ordinary citizens have had insults hurled at them, while posters and graffiti announcing their imminent death spring up all over the place." (2001, 1)

---

- "Collective Passion". *Al Ahram Weekly*. September 20-26, 2001.
- Aijaz, Ahmed. "Orientalism and After." *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature*. London: Verso, 1992.
- Bernstein, Richard. "Edward Said, Leading Advocate of Palestinians, Dies at 67." *The New York Times*. 25 September, 2003.
- Bernstein, Richard. "Edward Said, Leading Advocate of Palestinians, Dies at 67." *The New York Times*. 26 September, 2003.
- Goldberg, Michelle. "Osama Univeristy" Salon.com 6 November, 2003.  
[http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2003/11/06/middle\\_east/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2003/11/06/middle_east/index.html)
- Jarah, Nouri. "Edward Said Discusses "Orientalism", Arab Intellectuals, Reviving Marxism and Myth in Palestinian History." *Aljadid Magazine*. Vol. 5, no.28 (Summer 1999). Michael Massing, "Now They Tell Us," *New York Review of Books*, February 26, 2.
- Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.
- . "Dreams and Illusions" *Al Ahram Weekly*. August 21-27 2003.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.
- . "Punishment by Detail" *Al Ahram Weekly*. August 8-14 2002.
- . 'The Essential Terrorist', in Said, E., Hitchens, C. (eds), *Blaming The Victims. Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, Verso, London 1988, pp. 149-158.
- . "The Meaning of Rachel Corrie: Of Dignity and Solidarity", *CounterPunch*. (June 12, 2003).
- . "Together We Stand." *The Guardian Weekly*, 20-26 September, 2001.
- Smith, Dinitia. "A Stone's Throw is a Freudian Slip." *The New York Times*. 10 March, 2001.
- Weiner, Justus Reid. "My Beautiful Old House and Other Fabrications." *Commentary*. (September 1999).
-

*Julian Vigo is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at the Université de Montréal where she teaches comparative literature, performance studies, ethnography, cultural theory, theories of modernity and postmodernity, and gender studies. In addition to her academic research and pedagogy, Julian Vigo is also a dj and an installation and video artist and has been making ethnographic film and video in Latin America, the Middle East, the Maghreb, Europe and the United States since 1988.*